COLLEGE EXPANSION INITIATIVE

March 2001

AN OVERVIEW

The College Expansion Initiative represents the most significant investment in the college-system since its inception some thirty years ago. Building on their strengths, the Initiative seeks to position the Province's four public colleges to respond to the labour market needs of tomorrow.

Calls to expand the colleges date back to the early-90s and the Roblin Commission which recognized the chronic under-development of the college-system. This under-development has been consistently documented by Statistics Canada which reports that the participation-rate of 18-21 year olds in college certificate and diploma programs is a mere six per cent in Manitoba as compared to the national average of twenty-five per cent. This stands in contrast to a university participation-rate for this group which is roughly at the national average of thirty per cent. Clearly, this is a situation that could not be allowed to persist. As Premier Doer has put it, "This is an economic priority for Manitoba. In today's world, diplomas are a passport to real jobs and hope."

College Expansion and the Century Summit

Launched at the time of the Manitoba Century Summit, the College Expansion Initiative was a direct beneficiary of the Summit's work. The Summit's "Workforce Development" session provided direction on issues such as the link between labour market needs and training strategies, life-long learning, and improved access to education and training. These types of issues are reflected in the Initiative's Operational Framework which aims to provide direction to the college system [see attachment for complete text]. The goals of the Framework are as follows:

- Address labour market needs by reducing important skill shortages
- Pay particular attention to the needs of under-served groups
- Enhance youth participation rates
- Improve student success by concentrating on retention and graduation rates
- Encourage innovative means to make the system more efficient
- Stimulate workplace-based programming that improves the skills of those in the existing workforce

The Operational Framework is central to the College Expansion Initiative's work. It is tangible evidence of the importance placed on the views expressed at the Century Summit.

The College Expansion Initiative in Action

Equally important in understanding the implementation of the College Expansion Initiative are the assumptions contained in the Operational Framework. These include:

- The Initiative will invest in cost-effective programming
- It will encourage linkages between colleges, between colleges and universities, between colleges and secondary schools
- It will enhance the linkages between colleges, businesses, and industries
- It will build upon strengths of the colleges and refine their respective roles
- It recognizes that Red River College, because of its size and location, will play a lead role in maintaining the system's comprehensiveness
- It will ensure that existing infrastructure will be used as much as possible

During its first year the Initiative invested $5 Million in the college system. Highlights of these investments are showcased in the following pages which are organized according to the goals outlined in the Operational Framework. As will be seen, the focus of the Initiative has been primarily on Goal One, although all goals have received attention. This is a natural outcome of having to address the most pressing issues at the outset of the Initiative.

Goal 1 **Address Labour Market Needs by Reducing Important Skill Shortages**

Explanation of Goal:

Skill shortages are related to economic sectors. In directing its investments, the College Expansion Initiative utilizes seven economic sectors and one special category:

- Aerospace / Aviation
- Agriculture / Natural Resources
- Business / Tourism
- Community / Human Services
- Health
- Information Communications Technology
- Manufacturing / Mechanical / Trades
- Strategic Interventions

The overall aim of the Initiative is to ensure that investment occurs in each of these sectors.

Investments To Date:

The Health sector has been a priority in the early years of this Government. Consequently, the Health sector figured large in the College Expansion Initiative's first year receiving $3.0 Million or 60% of the budget.

- *Accelerated Nursing Diploma*, Red River College
- *Licensed Practical Nursing Certificate*, Assiniboine Community College
- *Health Care Aide Certificate*, Keewatin Community College, Assiniboine Community College, and Red River College

Although the majority of investments to date have occurred in the Health sector, all economic sectors have been supported. Indeed, the multi-year expansion plans that are currently being developed at each college have as one of their central objectives the alleviation of skill shortages across sectors.

General Question:

- What can we do to ensure that key skill shortages are identified and that college students are attracted into these professions?

Goal 2 **Pay Particular Attention to Needs of Under-served Groups**

Explanation of Goal:

To meet the challenges of the next decade Manitoba will have to mobilize all its human resources. This means expanding services to ensure that those who have found themselves educationally disadvantaged have enhanced opportunities.

Investments To Date:

The Initiative focused on the need of under-served groups in the following ways:

- *Aboriginal Nursing ACCESS*, at Red River College, provides educational supports for Aboriginal students wishing to enter the accelerated nursing program.
- *Business Administration Diploma by Distance*, at Assiniboine Community College, allows students from remote communities to enroll in courses.
- *General Studies Diploma*, at Keewatin Community College, allows those who are educationally under-prepared to pursue an integrated program of studies that blends upgrading courses with a certificate or diploma.

General Question:

- What can we do to better support under-served learners?

Goal 3 **Enhance youth participation rates**

Explanation of Goal:

As already noted, Manitoba's youth participation rate in community college training is one quarter of the national average. Altering participation rates, however, is extremely difficult because they are often based on perceptions. Improving the perception of the benefits of a college education is a long-term objective of the Initiative.

Investments To Date:

No specific proposals have been funded under this goal to date. However, the following activities are underway:

- Discussions are ongoing as to how high school programs can be integrated into college programs. This activity will be complimentary to current efforts aimed at articulating vocational programs in the high schools to certificate and diploma programs in the colleges. This would ensure a steady flow of students from high school into college and shorten the duration of training required at the college.

- The Initiative has developed a communications strategy that will announce the various investments being made in new programs. Cumulatively, these announcements will raise the profile of the colleges and demonstrate the increasingly sophisticated nature of college training.

General Question:

- What can we do to develop public consciousness, and in particular that of youth, to view a college education as a real and viable option?

Goal 4 **Improve student success by concentrating on retention and graduation rates**

Explanation of Goal:

Statistics Canada reports that Manitoba has one of the lowest graduation rates in Canada for college diploma programs. Retention, therefore, is a major issue with serious economic consequences. Indeed, investing in new programs is a questionable practice if high rates of attrition prevail.

Investments To Date:

- The College Expansion Initiative has invested in one pilot project at Keewatin Community College. This project will allow the College to devise a retention strategy and provide staff at its two main campuses, Thompson and The Pas, to implement the strategy. Results of this project will be shared with other colleges.

General Question:

- What types of interventions are necessary in order to retain students and optimize graduation rates?

Goal 5 **Encourage innovative means to make the system more efficient**

Explanation of Goal:

Efficiencies in the college system can benefit students and institutions alike. For cost conscious students time and distance tend to be important factors. For institutions cost-effectiveness is a significant concern. As a result, the College Expansion Initiative places a high value on proposals designed to address this goal.

Investments To Date:

- Assiniboine Community College has received funding to put both its Early Childhood Education and Business programs into distance formats. As a result, students will be able to pursue credentials in their home locations.

- Red River College has also received significant funding for its distance education unit. This investment will have a major impact on a wide range of programs offered by the College. This delivery is highly cost-effective for the College.

- *Tri-College Common First Year.* Currently only Red River College offers the common first year that feeds into nine separate technology programs. With College Expansion Initiative support, the common year will be extended to both Assiniboine and Keewatin Community Colleges. The result will be significantly reduced costs for students who will be able to take over half of their program in their region. It will also significantly benefit Red River College which will receive a steady flow of second year students. This is an example of inter-college cooperation benefiting students and institutions alike.

General Question:

- What can we do to improve the efficiency of the college-system?

Goal 6	**Stimulate workplace-based programming that improves the skills of those in the existing workforce**

Explanation of Goal:

Workplace-based programming will be critical to maintaining the skill levels of the workforce over the long-term. In an era of rapid change it may well become the predominant paradigm for lifelong learning.

Investments To Date:

- *Early Childhood Education Diploma Workplace Model*, at Red River College. This classroom-based project maximizes the credit that can be secured from learning that has occurred in the workplace. It delivers its training at times and locations that will permit students to maintain their employment and is designed to assist those already working in Child Care Centres to secure their ECE Level II accreditation.

General Question:

- What kinds of partnerships can be developed that will facilitate the delivery of essential college programming in the workplace?

Future Directions

As its second year begins, the College Expansion Initiative enters a new phase. Start-up issues are now behind it. Long-term planning is underway. The time is ripe for consultation.

Over the past few months, the Initiative has worked with colleges to develop multi-year expansion plans. Although these plans are still in their formative stage it is time to share them. To this end, the Presidents of all four Colleges will present the more significant details of their plan to indicate where the college might be five years from now. These visions, plus the record of the first year of the College Expansion Initiative, will be the focus of discussions at the Manitoba Training and Education Summit in Winnipeg.

We need to know what you think of our goals. Do they adequately reflect the recommendations of the Manitoba Century Summit? Do they address the needs of the labour market? And, more broadly, What do you suggest we do to enhance the colleges' ability to contribute to Manitoba's economic future? Your comments will provide valuable feedback as we attempt to move the colleges forward.

Attachment: College Expansion Initiative's Operational Framework

The College Expansion Initiative is intended to be a catalyst for the growth and evolution of Manitoba's college-system and is strongly supported by Government which has established a dramatic increase in training opportunities for all Manitobans as an economic priority.

The Initiative addresses the need to reverse the chronic under-development of colleges, which is hampering provincial prosperity and has relegated Manitoba to the bottom of inter-provincial training comparisons.

It is expected that the College Expansion Initiative will:

- Address labour market needs by reducing important skill shortages
- Pay particular attention to the needs of under-served groups
- Enhance youth participation rates
- Improve student success by concentrating on retention and graduation rates
- Encourage innovative means to make the system more efficient
- Stimulate workplace-based programming that improves the skills of those in the existing workforce

The Initiative operates under the following assumptions:

- That it will invest in cost-effective programming that will foster and maintain a comprehensive college-system
- That it will encourage programs that enhance the linkages between colleges, between the colleges and the universities and between the colleges and the secondary school system in order to achieve a more co-ordinated approach to labour market development
- That it will enhance the linkages between the colleges and business and industry that have been carefully forged over the years
- Given the close connection between economic prosperity and training, it will ensure that new programming meshes with key socio-economic policy areas
- That it will build upon the strengths of the colleges and, through investments in new programs, refine their respective roles
- By virtue of its size and location, Red River College will play a lead role in developing and maintaining the system's comprehensiveness
- That existing infrastructure will be used as much as possible

The College Expansion Initiative Office will:

- Take the lead in working collaboratively with colleges to develop four-year plans aimed at maximizing enrollments
- Ensure the integration of individual college plans to achieve a coordinated approach to labour market development
- Take the lead in organizing public consultations to determine the direction being taken is consistent with the needs of stakeholders

The Colleges will:

- Develop programs and services that are relevant to the needs of their constituencies
- Create sustainable rolling four-year plans
- Report annually to Government through the Initiative on their success in expanding enrollments

The Council on Post-Secondary Education will:

- Grant final approval of all program proposals